



Lower Wolf River Bottomlands Natural Resources Area



Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources



Volume 1, Issue 1

Designing Department Lands

The purpose, significance, and exceptional resources of the Lower Wolf River Bottomlands Natural Resources Area (LWRBNRA) are key elements that will shape the



Aerial of Wolf River Bottomlands Wildlife Area – K&S Unit

master plan. The purpose(s) of the Lower Wolf River Bottomlands and existing state lands tells us why these properties were established. The significance of the project and properties explains what is special about this area and why it's important to our state's natural and recreational resources, and how it differs from other projects or properties. The exceptional resources further elaborate on the project/properties significance in a

more local way. As we design the future management and use of the Lower Wolf River Bottomlands Natural Resources Area, all of the goals, management alternatives and prescriptions should be consistent with and support the project purpose, significance, and highlight its exceptional resources. Inside this newsletter we hope you'll learn these things about the project.

The Purpose of Department Lands

Statutory property designations are the authority under which the Department acquires and manages a property. This designation, assigned by the Natural Resources Board or the legislature, sets the general purpose of a property.

The Lower Wolf River Bottomlands Natural Resources Area is the name for this overall integrated project. Within the Natural Resources Area the lands are designated as either habitat area, wildlife area, fishery area, or natural area.

Habitat Area. The lands acquired within the Natural Resources Area that are not within a pre-existing Department project boundary are designated as a habitat area (s.

23.092.) Habitat areas are to enhance wildlife-based recreation, including hunting, fishing, nature appreciation and the viewing of game and non-game species. Management is to protect, enhance or restore habitat.

Wildlife Area. Lands acquired under the authority of sections 23.09 (2)(d) 3 and 15 State Statute "for the purpose of providing areas in which any citizen may hunt, trap, or fish." Other recreation activities can be accommodated where they are compatible and do not detract from this primary objective.

Fishery Area. Lands acquired under the authority of sections 23.09

(2)(d) 3 and 14 State Statute "for the purpose of providing areas in which any citizen may hunt, trap, or fish." The purpose is to protect habitat and provide fishing recreation. Other recreation activities can be accommodated where they are compatible and do not detract from this primary objective.

State Natural Areas (ss. 23.27). The statute states "natural area means an area of land or water which has educational or scientific value or is important as a reservoir of the state's genetic or biological diversity and includes any buffer area necessary to protect the area's natural values."

Inside this issue:

<i>Lower Wolf River Bottomlands Significance</i>	2
<i>Exceptional Resources of the LWRBNRA</i>	2
<i>Regional Analysis Findings</i>	2
<i>LWRBNRA Vision & Goals</i>	3
<i>Working Together in Conservation</i>	3
<i>Public Involvement Process</i>	3
<i>Setting Management Goals</i>	4
<i>Planning Segments & Map</i>	4&5
<i>Brochure Available</i>	6

Special points of interest:

- *LWRBNRA Significance and Exceptional Resources*
- *Highlights from the Regional Analysis*
- *Descriptions on planning segments along the Wolf River*
- *Map of planning segments*
- *Lower Wolf River Bottomlands Natural Resources Area Brochure Available*

Lower Wolf River Bottomlands Significance

The Lower Wolf River Bottomlands Natural Resources Area contains some of the most significant natural communities in northeast Wisconsin, if not within the state. This area provides important habitat for various wildlife and aquatic communities. It harbors some of the state's largest contiguous tracts of bottomland forest and numerous wetlands. In particular, this area contains:

- Over 43% of all the state's native plant species can be found here
- Approximately, 60% of the state's breeding bird species use this area.
- Many threatened, endangered, or special concern plant and animal species.
- These resources exist less than an hour away from expanding communities of Green Bay and Fox Cities.

Exceptional Resources of the Lower Wolf River Bottomlands Natural Resources Area

Exceptional management opportunities for management fall under 4 broad categories:

Floodplain Forest, Marshes, and Aquatic Communities – in eastern WI there are no other sites that offer comparable opportunities in terms of scale and overall quality of these communities.

Upland Forest and Marshes – these are buffer areas within the project where both northern and southern forest types are found. This “transition zone” provides a diverse landscape.

Migratory Corridor – an area rich with neotropical migratory birds and bats that extensively use area as well as migratory waterfowl, cranes, and shorebirds.

Uncommon or Rare Natural Communities - northern sedge meadow in the southern portion of the project ; southern mesic forest in

middle stretches; and tamarack swamps in various portions are naturally occurring and regionally rare.



*Yellow-crowned
Night Heron*



*Lush forest
canopy*



Swans & Geese

Regional Analysis Findings

A draft regional analysis has been prepared which in more detail looks to ecological and socioeconomic information and summarizes opportunities, limitations, and the project niche/role with the surrounding area. Regional analysis details will be available when a draft plan is prepared. In the interim here are some of the findings:

- The lower Wolf River corridor is one of the longest unpounded warmwater rivers in the Midwest.
- The Wolf River is the basin's largest watercourse.
- The globally rare lake sturgeon has several spawning sites along the Wolf River and several tributaries.
- The natural resources of the lower Wolf River are an integral part of the region's cul-

tural and economic communities.

- Hunting, trapping, boating, and fishing are well-established activities and strongly held traditions within this corridor.
- The demand for recreational land is increasing. Nearby population centers of Appleton, Neenah-Menasha, and Green Bay have exceeded state and national averages in growth.
- In the 4 surrounding counties (Outagamie, Shawano, Waupaca, Winnebago), only a small portion of conservation and recreation land are available. The LWRBNRA provides the majority of this land.
- Natural-resource based recreation is almost entirely provided by state lands within the LWRBNRA, and surrounding communities expect this to continue.
- There are unique vegetation management

opportunities that can occur in the southern portion of the project such as northern sedge meadow and not in other areas within the project.

- Ecologically, the project is best suited for floodplain forests and wetlands, some natural communities found along the rivers are occurring on the edge of their range – bog, sand prairies.



*Filtering aquatic invertebrates for
inventory*

LWRBNRA Vision & Goals

Through the feasibility study, a common vision and goals were developed. This vision broadly describes the overall resource conditions, land, water, and recreational uses. The goals broadly describe how we might achieve the vision, or at least things to consider in making management decisions.

Vision

The Lower Wolf River Bottomlands Natural Resources Area will be managed recognizing the interconnectedness of air, water, and land in sustaining ecosystems in balance with local cultural and economic values. In partnership with citizens as stewards of the natural resources, we work to protect, restore, maintain, and enhance healthy, diverse ecosystems and the natural scenic beauty of the corridor, while providing compatible recreational pursuits and educational opportunities for current and future generations.

Goals

The land along the Lower Wolf River Bottomlands is protected through ecologically sound management decisions that reflect long-term considerations for healthy ecosystems.

The Lower Wolf River Bottomlands protects the quality and quantity of surface and groundwater resources.

All citizens share the responsibility for the stewardship of the natural resources in the Lower Wolf River Bottomlands for the benefit of current and future generations.

The public has opportunities to experience a diverse range of compatible outdoor recreational and educational activities that enhance the quality of life and economy within the Lower Wolf River Bottomlands.

The Lower Wolf River Bottomlands provides opportunities to preserve agricultural land through creative land management options.

Working Together in Conservation

Department staff works with landowners in protecting and conserving additional lands within the LWRBNRA in a variety of ways. The lands that the state has either purchased or eased will provide additional walleye and sturgeon spawning habitat, nesting cover for woodland birds and waterfowl, and fishing opportunities.

Since establishing the LWRBNRA in March 2002 the Department has acquired:

- ❖ An conservation easement of 161 acres along the Little Wolf River
- ❖ Purchased 148 acres within the Wolf River Wildlife Area and 34 acres within the Rat River Wildlife Area
- ❖ Over 700 acres of shorelands along the Wolf and Embarrass Rivers, and Partridge Lake have been purchased.

These lands will continue to help maintain the character of the lower Wolf River for the future. There are many other acres of land in private ownership within the project that continue good land management practices and/or are enrolled in forest managed land programs.

Public Involvement Process

The purposes of public involvement include providing information, obtaining feedback, and building consensus, while allowing different opportunities for participation throughout the process. In the feasibility process for this project, we held a variety of meetings and open houses. We look forward to future meetings and open houses but want to streamline the process. So, we suggest that the planning team might look for alternative ways to rely on getting your input such as more newsletters, comment forms, and webpage use. We would still have some meetings but not as many as in the past. We are suggesting this method because we have an established working relationship; meetings require significant time commitments from you and staff; and we want/think that we can share and provide information as up-front workshop materials so that when we meet as a group we can have more immediate results.

We can adjust this suggested public involvement process if it's not working. Future mailings will describe this process in more detail and ask for your feedback. Our planning process will go beyond this year, likely into summer 2004.

If you have concerns about this process please contact Jill Mrotek.

Setting Management Goals for the LWRBNRA

"What? Didn't we already do that?" The answer is kind of. We did establish a broad vision and goals in the feasibility study, which really helps set the tone and sideboards for developing alternatives. But the LWRBNRA is a very large, landscape scale project that crosses various counties, ecological regions, and has different river characteristics. It would be more difficult if we didn't take a closer look at refining some of the existing goals and consider

the land capability more diligently. Therefore, the planning team has developed planning segments, which helps explain ecological capabilities and differences for areas along the river. We've provided general descriptions of the planning segment and a map that identifies the segments. For the purposes of planning, the planning team would like to approach developing more defined goals and management alternatives along these segments.

We'll still look at the project as a complete system, but in order organize information and management strategies we'll use the planning segments. We hope that you'll find that these planning segments make sense. The planning team delineated the 4 planning segments by considering river characteristics and uses and vegetative changes. Future newsletters will discuss more specific management opportunities.

Planning Segment Descriptions

Planning Segment 1 (Lake Poygan to Fremont)

This area is made up of big, flat open marshes, especially from Ourihula to Poygan. This is also the straightest, widest stretch of the Wolf River. The white bass fishery is important here not only for the species but for anglers as well. This stretch of the river receives a lot of recreation use; heavy boating activity occurs regularly. The adjacent river uplands within this stretch of the river are some of the most highly developed areas (i.e. Ourihula to Fremont) within the entire project. Other surrounding lands are rich agriculture fields of mostly corn. This portion of the project also has a highly developed and expanding highway network.

State lands within this section include the Rat River and Wolf River State Wildlife Areas. These wildlife areas were once more dominated by sedge meadows and marshes. Today, the marshlands have converted to reed canary grass, an aggressive invasive species. The primary purpose of these properties are to provide areas in which people may hunt, trap, and fish. Other recreation opportunities such as wildlife viewing, hiking, and canoeing are available.

The Rat River, a slow moving tributary, enters the Wolf River just above Lake Poygan. Approximately, 3 1/2 miles of the Rat River lies within the Rat River Wildlife Area.

Planning Segment 2 (Fremont to New London)

This is an area where most of the old river oxbows, cutoffs, and meanders are. This stretch of the river is wider than the northern sections of the Wolf River. Here the Little Wolf, Waupaca, and Embarrass feed into the river. This section of the river is where the majority of walleye spawning marshes are. In addition to walleye, there are premium spawning areas for northern pike, crappie, and other panfish. Because there is more fish species diversity, fishing opportunities are more abundant in this stretch of the river than elsewhere in the project. Sturgeon spawning sites also begin to occur here. Within this planning segment there are several lakes. Partridge, Partridge Crop, and Cincoe Lakes are part of the river, while White Lake is an isolated, relatively undeveloped lake.

This planning segment (2) also contains the largest, continuous bottomland hardwood forest in Northeast Wisconsin. Bottomland hardwood forest contributes to nesting habitat for neo-tropical birds, such as red-shouldered hawks and the cerulean warbler. Mukwa State Wildlife Area, the primary state land within this planning segment, is mostly comprised of bottomland forest and numerous old oxbows of the Wolf River.



Wolf River feeding into Lake Poygan



Section of Wolf River between Fremont and New London

Planning Segment Descriptions (continued)

Some heavy development of the shoreline does occur in this planning segment. The adjacent wetland and upland areas are minimally developed and are more rural or agricultural lands. There are few interior roads off the few main highways, which contribute to the continuous forested land.

Planning Segment 3 (New London to Leeman)

In this stretch of the river begins to narrow and has more snags. The shoreline is more densely forested and less open marsh areas. There tend to be more scenic views and less development than the lower portion of the river. Although fishing is still very popular, boating activity is less than areas downstream. This section of the Wolf River and lower portion of the Embarrass River, also within this planning segment, have a high concentration of sturgeon spawning sites and some remaining walleye spawning areas.



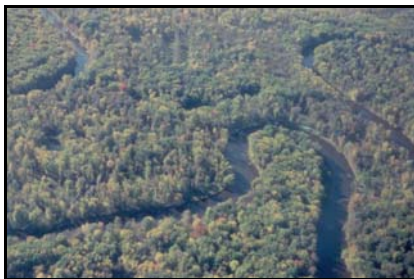
Wolf River Shoreline

The areas between the Wolf and Embarrass River corridor support a wide variety of natural communities. This is because it's in a vegetation tension zone for transition. This means that plants more typical of both northern and southern Wisconsin may be found here. There are floodplain hardwood forests and wetlands, like those found in planning segments 1 and 2, but more upland forested areas of aspen, silver maple, and conifers such as tamarack and jack pine. Many other lands are agricultural lands of cabbage. A good road network of county highways exists but very few roads off the county highways lead to the rivers.

There are several state lands scattered within this planning segment. Two state natural areas Hortonville Bog and Shaky Lake, and five state wildlife areas Mack, Maine, Outagamie, Wolf River Bottoms - K&S Unit and LaSage Unit.

Planning Segment 4 (Leeman to Shawano)

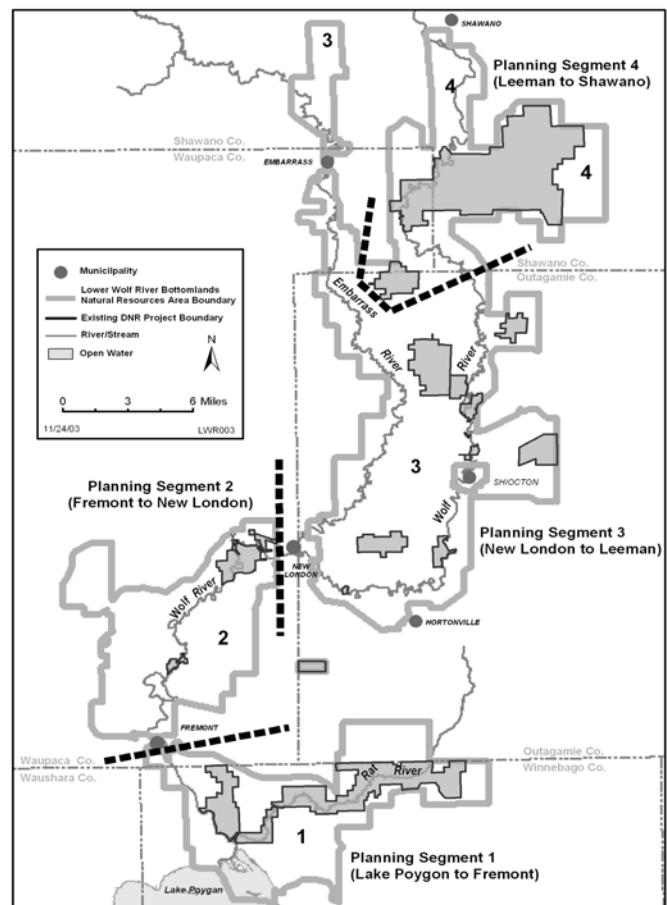
This is the narrowest, most meandering stretch on the lower Wolf River. The riverbanks are high, water is typically shallower, and it's a more rock and gravel riverbed. Because of the character of the river, boat activity is usually contained to small motor boats and canoes. Sturgeon spawning sites still are present and stop at the Shawano Dam. Non-game fish habitat is more prevalent although some small mouth bass, catfish, and flathead habitat is also present.



Meandering Wolf River south of Shawano

Here is where there are significant upland areas, which are mostly forested. This is also where the greatest amount of state ownership within the entire project occurs and the state's 5th largest wildlife area can be found; Navarino State Wildlife Area. Deer Creek State Wildlife Area is a smaller property but also in this planning segment.

Regional View of Lower Wolf River Bottomlands Natural Resources Area Planning Segments



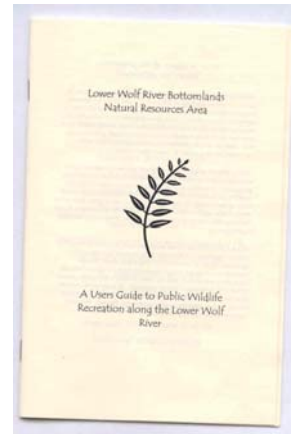
For More Information Contact:
Wisconsin Department of Natural
Resources
Attn: Jill Mrotek
1125 N. Military Avenue
PO Box 10448
Green Bay, WI 54307-0448
Phone: 920.492.5830
Fax: 920.492.5913
Email: Jill.Mrotek@dnr.state.wi.us

We're on the web!
**[www.dnr.state.wi.us/
master_planning/wolf](http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/master_planning/wolf)**



Brochure Available of the Lower Wolf River Bottomlands Natural Resources Area

The planning team has developed a brochure that includes maps and information on current state lands within the LWRBNRA. If you're interested in receiving a copy please contact Jill Mrotek or visit www.dnr.state.wi.us/master_planning/wolf.



Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
1125 N. Military Avenue
PO Box 10448
Green Bay, WI 54307-0448

